Public Participation in Community Decision-Making

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UNIVERSITY *of* NEW HAMPSHIRE
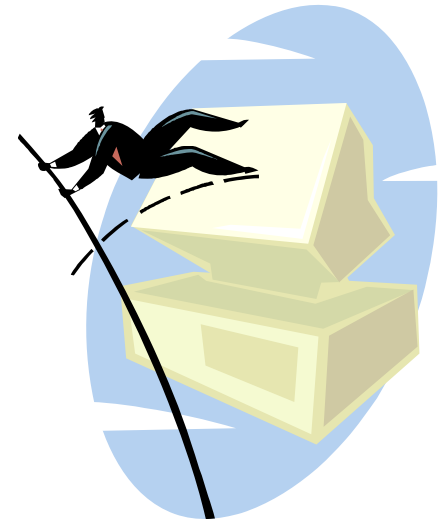COOPERATIVE EXTENSION

Why Engage the Public?

◆ **To identify community needs**

◆ **To educate and empower citizens and decision-makers**

◆ **To broaden the asset base**

◆ **To make implementation more likely by building ownership**

◆ **To build accountability and effective feedback**

Different Approaches of Community Engagement for Different Purposes

◆Is the purpose…

– Community Building?

– Public Information?

– Deliberation?

– Decision Making?

Public Participation Approaches

◆ Citizen Advisory Committees

◆ Interest-Based Problem Solving

Citizen Advisory Committee

Citizen advisory committees foster positive relations with the community by engaging citizens in the development of policies and programs to ensure that they are enriched by diverse perspectives.

Advantages

- Diverse representation
- Based on local assets
- Directly engages citizens in policy-making

Challenges

- Committees often don't have jurisdictional power
- Requires much time/effort
- Can suffer low return rates

How are they helpful?

- Help anticipate public reaction to proposed decisions

- Provide communication to constituencies

- Organize a forum for building consensus

- The advisory committee becomes more educated and their feedback is more informed

When are they used?

◆ Master Plans

  – Representative of various groups in community with a chair to coordinate meetings and report back to town boards

  – Can work to develop public involvement opportunities for Plan update

Turning lemons into lemonade

When you hear the word "conflict" what images come to mind?

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What sorts of conflicts do you have in your community?

How are they dealt with?

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What are some positive aspects of public conflict:

- ◆ Possibility of mutual gains solutions
- ◆ Addresses problems and promotes action
- ◆ Builds long-term relationships
- ◆ Stimulates creativity
- ◆ Strengthens democracy
- ◆ Leadership emerges

Interest Based Problem Solving

Interest-Based Problem Solving is an issue-resolution process that addresses individual and group differences in a problem-solving environment.

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Advantages

- Focuses on common interests – win-win
- Fosters creativity
- Solutions weighed with objective criteria
- Builds leadership

Challenges

- Requires skilled facilitator
- Not all issues are resolvable
- Process can be frustrating and take a very long time
- Some parties intentionally work to corrupt process

Positions Are...

◆ Emotions – how someone feels about an issue

◆ A pre-determined solution

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Interests are…

◆ Needs, beliefs, values behind the positions.

◆ Why something is important.

Why focus on interests?

- Gets to heart of issue.

- Moves people beyond polarized positions.

- Sets stage for mutual understanding.

- Leads to group cooperation.
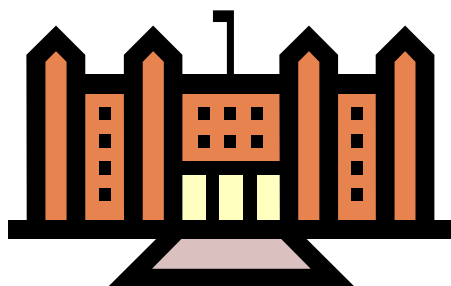
- Sets stage for generating creative options.

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Examples of interests & positions:

Cost-efficiency
Educational quality
Stretch resources

Interests

Community pride
Value historic school
Educational quality

Want school
consolidation

Positions

Oppose school
consolidation

Know what you are Prepared to Live With

◆ **BATNA**: Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement

◆ **WATNA**: Worst Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement

◆ **MLATNA**: Most Likely Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement

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Structure the Process:

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- ◆ Establish procedures
- ◆ Define the problem each parties' needs
- ◆ Specify information needs
- ◆ Generate options
- ◆ Develop/implement criteria for evaluating options
- ◆ Reach agreement
- ◆ Develop a written plan.

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More Resources on Public Participation Tools:

Asset Mapping: http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/en/sub_section_main_1043.htm

Concerns Survey: http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/en/sub_section_main_1018.htm

Needs Survey: http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/en/sub_section_main_1042.htm

Focus Groups: http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/en/sub_section_main_1045.htm

Interviews: http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/en/sub_section_main_1047.htm

Public Forums: http://ctb.ku.edu/tools/en/sub_section_main_1021.htm